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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000352

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SUBJECT: ABDALLAHI'S EMISSARIES' CONCERNS ABOUT MEDIATION

Classified By: Ambassador Mark M. Boulware for reasons 1.5 (B) and (D).

11. (C) Summary: Sidney Sokhna, Diplomatic Advisor to President Abdallahi, called on Ambassador to provide background on the Senegalese mediation and seek clarification of the USG position. Sokhna said that pro-democracy forces in the FNDD and RFD suspected the impartiality of mediators and were surprised to be presented with a draft political accord rather than being able to work one out through discussion. He argued that the proposed election date of July 11 did not provide enough time to review electoral lists, establish a national union government and new electoral commission and to prepare for and conduct elections. He called on the international community to reiterate its warning against a "unilateral" solution. Ambassador affirmed that the USG supported mediation efforts and wanted to see a consensual solution to the crisis but urged maximum flexibility and engagement by all parties to achieve that consensus. End summary.

12. (C) Sidney Sokhna, Diplomatic Advisor to elected President Abdallahi, called on Ambassador May 24 at the President's request to discuss the ongoing Senegalese efforts and to inquire about the position of the USG and the international community. Sokhna indicated that President Abdallahi as well as the democratic forces opposing the August 6, 2008 coup d'etat had serious doubts about the mechanics of the mediation as well as Senegal's impartiality.

13. (C) Sokhna said that there had been no direct talks between the three parties involved: the FNDD (the coalition of parties supporting President Abdallahi), the RFD (Ould Daddah's party) and General Aziz' supporters. Moreover, he said that even when President Wade visited President Abdallahi in Lemdem, there had been no substantive discussions about the terms of any eventual consensus agreement. Sokhna indicated that both the FNDD and the RFD were surprised to be presented with a framework agreement that did not represent the fruit of dialogue and discussion but rather a ready made draft that favored General Aziz' position over that of the democratic opponents of the coup.

14. (C) Calling the proposed date of July 11 for delayed elections completely unrealistic, Sokhna said that there was far too much to be done in the interim to stage credible elections by that date. He observed that an interim government of national union would take time to negotiate as would a new electoral commission not to mention the necessary revision of the electoral lists. Rather than establishing an

arbitrary date for new elections, Sokhna argued that there should first be discussion and agreement on the details of the preparations and the time necessary to complete them. He found the draft accord's rationale for early elections, the six month limit given under the AU Charter for the return to constitutional order, to be unconvincing. He said that both the FNDD and the RFD believed that free and fair elections could not be organized that quickly.

15. (C) Sokhna lamented that there was no sign of flexibility or good faith gestures from the Aziz camp. Recalling that both the FNDD and the RFD had asked that political prisoners be freed and that the junta-organized Presidential campaign be suspended in order to facilitate good faith efforts to find a consensus, he noted that neither issue had been positively addressed. Aziz continues to campaign vigorously, he said, while the "interim government" was making special distributions of food to the poor to build support for Aziz.

16. (C) According to Sokhna, President Abdallahi and his supporters wondered what had happened to the international community and the position it had taken at the February 20 meeting of the International Contact Group condemning a unilateral approach as "counterproductive and unacceptable." He noted that the unilateral approach was in the process of being implemented and said that President Abdallahi called on the US and other members of the international contact group to publicly reiterate that position.

17. (C) Asked to clarify the US position, Ambassador

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Boulware said that the US position remained unchanged citing the Department's statement of May 20. He affirmed US support for the Senegal's mediation precisely because it appeared to be the last best chance to avoid a unilateral solution. He noted growing concern both inside and outside Mauritania that the political impasse was detrimental to Mauritania and posed ever greater risks. Asked about the role of the US and the international community in crafting the draft accord, the Ambassador noted that members of the contact group had been briefed on the essential elements of the proposal by Foreign Minister Gadio and his fellow mediators on May 21 and had been previously consulted about general parameters of a potential agreement but, speaking for the US, had not been involved in drafting the particulars. Ambassador said that the US considers that any agreement must be consensual but urged the greatest possible flexibility by all parties in the interest of the nation.

18. (C) Sokhna said that President Abdallahi had been advised of a new initiative by President Wade who had invited leaders of the three political groups to send delegations to Dakar on May 26 to "discuss and finalize" the draft agreement for a political solution. Sokhna noted that the FNDD and RFD were discussing whether to accept the invitation and would likely do so although he thought the date would probably slip by a day or two. He shared strong reservations about using the draft proposal as a basis for discussion, saying that there should be a regular and neutral agenda noting the points to be discussed and resolved. He promised to stay in touch with the Ambassador and advise him of their decision.

19. (C) Comment: The briefing to members of the International Contact Group by mediators on May 21 left the impression that there was general agreement on the major points of the draft accord even though some key issues remained to be resolved. Not only do those points, i.e. suspension of the ongoing campaign and freeing the political prisoners, remain unresolved but there still are very significant differences between Aziz and his supporters and the two groups opposing the coup. Although the USG should support a consensual solution, even an imperfect one, that would permit an acceptable resolution of the crisis and a return to constitutional order via anticipated elections,

that consensus remains elusive. Pro-democracy forces are wary of mediation efforts that will leave them to choose between hasty elections that can only legitimize the coup d'etat and advocacy of a more careful transition that may leave it vulnerable to blame for any failure to achieve consensus.

BOULWARE